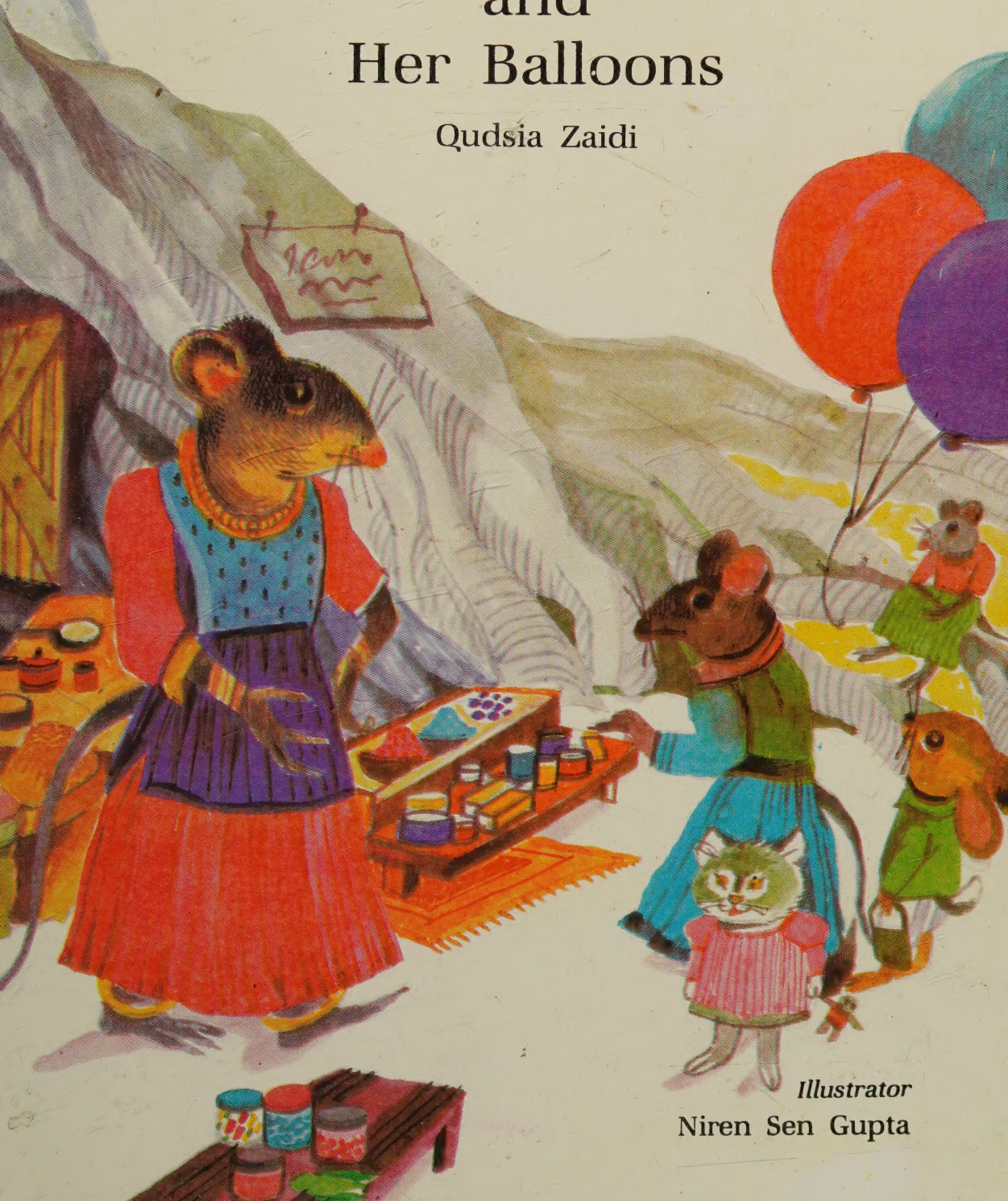




Begum Gulabo Mousie and Her Balloons

Qudsia Zaidi



Illustrator
Niren Sen Gupta



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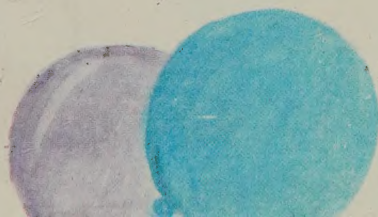
To Jasmine (Jassy)
hope you are having
fun in the snow -
I miss you,
love
Mannah

Begum Gulabo Mousie and Her Balloons

Illustrator : Sen Gupta
Translator : Putehally



NATIONAL BOOK TRUST, INDIA





Begum Gulabo Mousie was a smart little lady. She had set up shop among the roots of the oldest mango tree outside the village. Here she sold delicious things to eat and lots of pretty toys. There were tiny glass jars







filled with sweets and arranged in neat rows on a shelf. On a low table in a corner, toys were carefully set out for display. And for the grown-up mousies there were things that only grown-ups like—needles, threads, buttons, laces, and hooks.

Mousies who lived nearby all went to Begum Gulabo's shop to buy anything they needed.

As soon as the rains were over, Begum Gulabo



decided to go to town to restock her shop. She put on a flowered kurta and a bright red skirt and draped a yellow *orni* over her head. She took a very large bag, and was ready to leave.

Just then she saw Mian Bhurey's cart standing close by. She got into it and set off for town with him. Whenever the kind Mian Bhurey saw a friend on the



way, he would give him a lift, so by the time they reached town, the cart was tightly packed with people. Some of them wanted to buy things, others to sell the things they had made. Some had made sweetmeats with sesame seeds, some with *gur*, others had little mud toys to sell.







As soon as they reached town Begum Gulabo jumped out of the cart. She quickly started to make her purchases. She was friendly with all the shopkeepers and chatted with them, asking about their families.



When Begum Gulabo had bought all she wanted and her bag was quite full, she made her way back to the cart. Just then she saw some balloons in a shop. She thought, "I must get these. Village children will love them. They will come to my shop to buy them."



So Begum Gulabo bought balloons—two of every colour—and got into the cart. As the cart moved, the balloons began to blow about. Everyone in the cart enjoyed watching them.

After a long day Begum Gulabo was tired. So, when she got home, before doing anything else, she went





into the kitchen and made herself a nice, hot cup of tea. Refreshed, she went to her shop, to arrange the new things on her shelves.

As she was doing this, she heard a small thin sound, as if someone was scratching on something.



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After everything else had been set out, it was the turn of the balloons. She wanted to hang them up near the window so that the children would see them from outside and run home to get money from their mothers to buy them.

As Begum Gulabo was untying the string of the



balloons, she heard a very small voice say, "Please let me out—please, oh please let me get out!"

Begum Gulabo thought, "I'm sure that voice comes from the balloons," and put her ear close to them. The voice really was coming from a red balloon.

Begum Gulabo ran, got a needle, and poked it into the balloon. There was a loud bang. A tiny elf dressed in green, came out. He said politely, "Thank you. Oh, thank you so much for setting me free."

Begum Gulabo was surprised. "Arre! Who are you and how did you get inside the balloon?"



The elf replied, "I live in a sun's ray. This morning I came down the ray on a ladder with my friends, to go to a toy shop. We started playing hide-and-seek. We hid wherever we could. I hid in this red balloon. I was inside it, when someone came and filled it with air and tied its mouth with a string. At first I thought I'd be able to break out and ride home on my sunray before evening. Now I don't know what to do. My ladder is at the toy shop, so I can't climb on to my ray. How can I get home?"

"Don't worry," said Begum Gulabo kindly. "It's late now, just go to sleep. Tomorrow morning I'll take you back to the toy shop. You can find your ladder, climb on to the ray and get home."

Begum Gulabo found an empty soap box and laid a tiny mattress and pillow in it, to make a comfortable bed. Then she gave the elf a small soft sheet to cover himself with.

Next morning when Begum Gulabo went into the kitchen, the elf was still sleeping peacefully. As she opened the window, a single ray of sunshine came in, and the elf woke up. He said, "Good morning, Begum Gulabo." Begum Gulabo said, "Come, little one, I want you to have a good breakfast before you set off. What would you like to have?"

"I usually have a sip of dew," the elf said, "but today I will have whatever you give me."

Begum Gulabo brought a tiny cup in which she mixed a few drops of milk and some bread crumbs. She gave him a salt spoon to eat with.



As they were having their breakfast, Mian Chu Chu Sparrow came into the shop to buy a pair of sunglasses. "Well, well, who is your guest?" he asked. Begum Gulabo told him the story of the fairy and the red balloon.









Mian Chu Chu said,
"My cousin Chir Chir who
is staying with me, is going
back to town this morning.
I'll ask him to take the elf
with him."

"How kind of you," said
Begum Gulabo, and the elf
danced for joy.

While they were wait-
ing for Chir Chir, the elf
looked around the shop.
Begum Gulabo said, "If
there's anything you like,
just take it."

It was hard to choose
among so many lovely
things. The elf finally asked
for a little drum.



Soon Chu Chu and Chir Chir returned. Begum Gulabo helped the fairy climb on to Chir Chir's back.

"Goodbye, little elf," she cried. "Don't forget me. Come to see me again."

The elf promised to do so. And, as he flew off, riding on Chir Chir's back, he waved his handkerchief until he was out of sight.





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